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Idiocy  
SENATE.....No. 51.

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MESSAGE.

*To the Honorable House of Representatives :—*

I transmit to the honorable House, for the use of the Legislature, the Report of the Commissioners under the Resolve of April 11, 1846, to inquire into the condition of the Idiots of the Commonwealth.

GEORGE N. BRIGGS.

COUNCIL CHAMBER, Feb. 28, 1848.

## Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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BOSTON, Feb. 26, 1848.

*To His Excellency, GEORGE N. BRIGGS, Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts :—*

SIR :—The undersigned, commissioners appointed by your excellency, under the act of April 11, 1846, "to inquire into the condition of the Idiots of the Commonwealth, to ascertain their number, and whether any thing can be done in their behalf," respectfully

### R E P O R T

as follows :—

When we accepted the task assigned to us, it was not without a sense of its importance. We did not look upon idiocy as a thing which concerned only the hundred, or thousand unfortunate creatures in this generation who are stunted or blighted by it; for even if means could be found of raising all the idiots now within our borders from their brutishness, and alleviating their suffering, the work would have to be done over again, because the next generation would be burdened with an equal number of them. Such means would only cut off the outward cancer, and leave the vicious sources of it in the system. We regarded idiocy as a disease of society; as an outward sign of an inward malady. It was hard to believe it to be in the order of Providence that the earth should always be cumbered with so many creatures in the human shape, but



without the light of human reason. It seemed impious to attribute to the Creator any such glaring imperfection in his handy-work. It appeared to us certain that the existence of so many idiots in every generation, *must* be the consequence of some violation of the *natural laws*;—that where there was so much suffering, there must have been sin. We resolved, therefore, to seek for the *sources* of the evil, as well as to gauge the depth and extent of the misery. It was to be expected that the search would oblige us to witness painful scenes, not only of misfortunes and sufferings, but of deformities and infirmities, the consequences of ignorance, vice, and depravity. The subjects of them, however, were brethren of the human family; the end proposed was not only to relieve their sufferings, and improve their condition; but, if possible, to lessen such evils in coming generations; the task, therefore, was not to be shrunk from, however repulsive and painful was its contemplation.

It is to be confessed, however, that we have been painfully disappointed by the sad reality, for the numbers of beings originally made in God's image, but now sunk in utter brutishness, is fearfully great, even beyond any thing that had been anticipated.

The examination of their physical condition forces one into scenes, from the contemplation of which the mind and the senses instinctively revolt.

In searching for the causes of this wretchedness in the condition and habits of the progenitors of the sufferers, there is found a degree of physical deterioration, and of mental and moral darkness, which will hardly be credited.

We would fain be spared any relation of what has been witnessed, as well for our own sake, as for the tastes and feelings of others, which must be shocked by the recital of it. It would be pleasanter simply to recommend such measures as would tend to remove the present evils, and prevent their recurrence. But this may not be. Evils cannot be grappled with, and overcome, unless their nature and extent are fully known. Besides, our duty was not only to examine into, but to report upon, the *condition* of the idiots in our Commonwealth; and that duty must be done.

During the year 1846, we endeavored, by means of circular letters addressed to the town clerks, and to other persons in every town of the Commonwealth, to ascertain the number, and, as far as could be, the condition of the idiots in their respective neighborhoods.

The answers obtained to most of these inquiries were, in many cases, very vague and unsatisfactory. It was soon seen that little dependence could be placed upon information so obtained, even as to numbers, much less, as to the condition and wants of the idiots. We, therefore, visited as many towns as possible, and endeavored, by personal observation and by inquiries, to gather all the information in our power, respecting the numbers and conditions and treatment of the unfortunate objects of our inquiry, both those in the public almshouses and at private charge.

It was not possible, however, to obtain all the desired information, because the researches were begun too late in the season, and because the subject grew in importance and in dreadful interest, the more closely it was examined.

The imperfect results of these inquiries were embodied in a report, made March 15th, 1847, and printed by order of the legislature.

Being directed to continue these labors, the painful inquiry was resumed during the last summer.

By diligent and careful inquiries in nearly one hundred towns in different parts of the state, we have ascertained the existence, and examined the condition, of *five hundred and seventy-four* human beings who are condemned to hopeless idiocy, who are considered and treated as idiots by their neighbors, and left to their own brutishness. They are also idiotic in a legal sense; that is, they are regarded as incapable of entering into contracts, and are irresponsible for their actions, although some of them would not be considered as idiots according to the definition of idiocy by medical writers. There are a few cases where insanity has terminated in total *dementia*. There are others where the sufferers seemed to have had all their faculties in youth, and to have gradually lost them, not by insanity but unknown



causes. Excluding such cases, there are four hundred and twenty persons who are to be regarded as truly idiots.

These are found in 77 towns. But all these towns were not thoroughly examined. Take therefore only the 63 towns, in which very minute inquiries were made. These contain an aggregate population of 185,942; among which, were found 361 idiots, exclusive of insane persons. Now if the other parts of the state contain the same proportion of idiots to their whole population, the total number in the Commonwealth is *between twelve and fifteen hundred!*

This is a fearful number, and it may seem to others, as it did at first to us, to be incredible. It is far greater than any calculation based upon previous returns to the legislature by commissions appointed to ascertain the number of lunatics and idiots, or than the number of idiots set down in the pauper abstract, published by the secretary of state, as supported or relieved by the towns. That document makes the number to be only 377; whereas, if our observations are correct, and the other towns in the state furnish a proportionate number of pauper idiots, then the whole number in the state should be over 500. It is probable, however, that the overseers of the poor, in making their return, gave only the number of idiots in almshouses, and overlooked many who receive aid from the towns at their own houses. When a poor woman applies for aid, they do not go to inquire whether any of her children are idiotic or not; whereas we pursued our inquiries into the families, and found many idiots there. However, without any reference to the manner in which other returns have been made, or any question about the degree of care which was observed, by those who made them, to distinguish between idiots and lunatics, it seems certain that our own return is a very near approach to the truth. Indeed, if there be any material error, it must be of omission, for our calculation is not based upon vague reports or answers returned to circulars. We have examined almost every case personally or by an agent on whom dependence could be placed, and in a few only have relied upon other sources of information which seemed unquestionable.

There is yet another mode by which to try the correctness of

these conclusions. The returns made to us in 1846, by the town clerks in 119 towns, containing an aggregate population of 213,993 inhabitants, give the names of 394 persons who are considered by them as idiots. If to these are added 361 idiots proper, found in 1847, in 63 other towns, containing an aggregate population of 178,693,—they make a total of 182 towns, and an aggregate of 392,586 inhabitants, among whom are found 755 idiots. In this ratio, the number in the state would be over 1300, even considering the population as no greater than it was in 1840, and supposing that the number in the towns that give imperfect returns, is even as great as in those that were thoroughly examined.

We make our report, therefore, of the number of idiots in the towns examined, with entire confidence that it is not too high; and conclude, moreover, that if the other parts of the Commonwealth furnish an equal number, there are over twelve hundred persons within the State who are considered and treated as idiots. This, it will be observed, is even a greater number than was supposed to exist, when the partial report of last year was made.

The same thing has been experienced, in estimates made of the number of the insane. When attention was first turned to the subject, the number reported was supposed to be altogether an exaggeration; yet every succeeding examination has shown that the number is greater than that given by the preceding ones.

Over four hundred idiots have been minutely inspected by us personally, or by an agent upon whom we can rely. Upon the bodily and mental condition of these will be based our remarks and conclusions.

In an appendix will be found their names,\* ages, physical condition, and mental and moral character. It may seem to some, who inspect the tables, that they contain many trivial details with regard to the physical condition of the persons named; but it is hard to be too minute in these statements.

\* We have reported the names, as in duty bound, but would suggest and request that they be not printed, only referred to by numbers. The feelings and wishes of many worthy families would be thereby respected and gratified.



The whole subject of idiocy is new. Science has not yet thrown her certain light upon its remote, or even its proximate causes. There is little doubt, however, that they are to be found in the CONDITION OF THE BODILY ORGANIZATION. The size and shape of the head, therefore; the proportionate development of its different parts; the condition of the nervous system; the temperament; the activity of the various functions; the development of the great cavities,—the chest and abdomen; the stature,—the weight,—every peculiarity, in short, that can be noted in a great number of individuals, may be valuable to future observers. We contribute our own observations to the store of facts, out of which science may, by and by, deduce general laws. If any bodily peculiarities, however minute, always accompany peculiar mental conditions, they become important; they are the finger-marks of the Creator, by which we learn to read his works.

There are yet more subtle causes of idiocy existing in the bodily organization, and derived from the action of that mysterious, but inevitable law, by which Nature, outraged in the persons of the parents, exacts her penalty from the persons of their children. We have endeavored to throw some light upon this also; or rather, to give a number of detached luminous points; trusting that more accurate observers will furnish many others, until all the dark surface shall be made bright, and the whole subject become clear.

The tables have been made with great care; and though they cannot pretend to perfect accuracy, they are recommended to the physiologist and student of nature, as furnishing humble, but important data.

With these introductory remarks, we proceed with our report.

#### DEFINITION OF TERMS. IDIOTS. IDIOCY.

A difficulty is met, at the very outset, in the want of terms which clearly explain and define themselves.

Our commission is to examine into the condition of idiots. What is an idiot?—*a being in the human form, but utterly devoid*

*of sense and understanding?* If so, then our report would be brief. None such have been found. Creatures are sometimes born of women, who are utterly wanting in the corporeal instruments by which understanding is most immediately manifested, —monsters without heads; but Nature lets none such cumber the earth; they come into life only to die; they take one short step from birth to death. All other beings in human shape, manifest *some* sense and understanding.

Take the case No. 349, recorded in the appendix, which furnishes an instance of the lowest kind of idiocy.

William — has the form and name of a human being, but not much else. He is at the age of early manhood, when some have gained victories in fields of war or science; but William has not yet learned enough to go alone, to feed himself, or know his own name. An intelligent dog *knows* more than he; and a child of two years old would be a prodigy of talent and knowledge compared with him. He lies most of the day upon a mat on the floor, rolling his lack-lustre eyes, and tossing his limbs. Sometimes they put him into a chair, and fasten him, as they do an infant, to prevent him from pitching forward. This change and approach to the human posture pleases him, but he soon slips down, and then moans and cries until they put him up again.

His natural desire for action, manifests itself by his continual motions and by his cries, for he is seldom quiet when awake. He cannot feed himself, and observes not the decencies of life as well as a trained dog or cat.

Surely, it will be said, this man is an idiot; and yet he is not devoid of sense and understanding.

He knows no arbitrary language; words are to him of less import than to a horse; and yet he has a natural language that tells you he has consciousness, memory, hope, fear, and even judgment and discrimination, feeble though it be. This language, too, tells imperfectly the story of his experience; it tells what kind of treatment he has received; it tells of kindness and cruelty, of gentle and harsh tones, of curses and blows.

When he is first approached abruptly, he shows signs of



fear, which you cannot mistake; he shrinks from your raised hand, and manifests signs of resistance and defence; but if you draw near to him gently, he does not shrink away; if you speak kindly to him, he smiles; if you caress him, he is pleased; and if you continue your gentle attentions, you may make him yield obedience to your wishes, as far as he can understand them. He has a yet higher faculty, the sense of music; the poor creature loves sweet sounds, and, in his most uneasy moments, all his contortions of body and all his wild cries are soothed into calm, and hushed into silence, by any music.

Surely this being has some sense and understanding; and, if so, then, according to the definition, he is not an idiot.

Every one would know a strongly marked case of idiocy, and say, unhesitatingly, the subject of it is an idiot. But there are a great many cases where it is difficult to say whether the understanding is or is not so feeble, that the person should be called an idiot; cases where a man seems to have some mental faculties well developed, but, in all other respects, is a fool; cases where it is hard to say whether a man's faculties had become deranged, or were never developed; cases where even physicians hesitate to say whether the patient is a lunatic or an idiot.

Without alluding to that very large class of persons who seem to have no perception of right and wrong, no idea of duties and responsibilities; who obey no human or divine law, but through fear of its penalties, let us take the narrowest ground, and speak of those whose *understanding* is so feeble that they are called idiots. Even here difficulties occur; for there are men who have some of the intellectual faculties well developed, and yet are called idiots. Take case No. 25. This young man knows the name and sound of every letter, he can put the letters into words, the words into sentences, and read off a page with correctness; but he would read over that page a thousand times, without getting the slightest idea of the meaning. He is, in all other respects, an idiot, and cannot be trusted to take a pail of swill to the swine, even after he has eaten a full dinner, lest he should cheat them and eat the crusts and tit-bits himself.

Take case No. 27. This young man's sense of melody seems active and acute. He knows, and can sing correctly, more than two hundred tunes; he will instantly detect a false note in any of them; yet he is an idiot in every other respect. If he is told to go and milk the cows, he stands and repeats over the words, "Billy, go and milk the cows," for hours together, or until some one tells him something else, which he will repeat over in the same way. But put a pail in his hand, and make the sign for milking, and give him a push, and he will go and fill the pail.

Take case No. 360. This man has the perception of combination of numbers in an extraordinary degree of activity. Tell him your age, and ask him how many seconds it is, and he will tell you in a very few minutes. In all other respects, he is an idiot.

If it were proper to travel out of our own record, and take cases which are vouched for by men high in science, many could be given far more remarkable than any that have fallen under our immediate observation. There are instances of the possession of moral sentiments, of marked tendencies to acts of kindness, of goodness, and of veneration, by persons idiotic in all other respects. We would gladly cite such instances, to prove that the germs of all our human duties, even of our duty to worship, exist in the very soil of the heart; that education does not plant them there, but only trains and cultivates them. We must not, however, be turned aside by such attractions from our path of inquiry.

The legal definitions do not help us to a knowledge of who are and who are not idiots. The old English law declares, that,

"Persons who are *non compos mentis* are idiots, or of non-sane memory."

"Idiots are *fatui naturales* which were of non-sane à *nativitate*." In order to test a man's idiocy, the law says, "it is sufficient to find him so, if he has not any use of reason; as if he cannot count twenty pence;" "if he has no understanding to tell his age; or who is his father or mother."



It declares, that "a man shall not be called an idiot if he has the understanding to learn or know letters;" "to learn by the instruction or information of another."

It gives to the king the custody of his lands and goods.\*

Now some of the cases recorded in the Appendix, upset every one of these definitions. Many have perfectly sane memories on certain topics. What they learn they never forget. There are cases, Nos. 175 and 192, idiots beyond all question, but who can count not only to 20, but to 20,000, and perform many simple arithmetical operations with a great deal more facility than ordinary persons.

There is case No. 277, a girl who can "learn and know letters," but can understand nothing of the subject to which they relate.

Blackstone says, "An idiot, or natural fool, is one that hath no understanding from his nativity, and therefore is by law presumed never likely to attain any."

\* Rex habbebit custodiam terrarum fatuorum naturalium, capiendo exitus earum sine vasto, et inveniet eis necessaria, de cujuscunque fœdo, et post mortem eorum reddit hæredibus. Prærog. Reg. 17 Ed. 2, 9.

"An idiot, or natural fool, is one that hath had no understanding from his nativity, and, therefore, is by law presumed never likely to attain any. For which reason, the custody of him and of his lands was formerly vested in the lord of the fee, and therefore still, by special custom, in some manors, the lord shall have the ordering of idiot and lunatic copyholders; but, by reason of the manifold abuses of this power by subjects, it was at last provided, by common consent, that it should be given to the king, as the general conservator of his people, in order to prevent the idiot from wasting his estate, and reducing himself and his heirs to poverty and distress. The fiscal prerogative of the king is declared in parliament by statute 17 Edw. II. c. 9., which directs, (in affirmation of the common law,) that the king shall have ward of the lands of natural fools, taking the profits without waste or destruction, and shall find them necessities; and after the death of such idiots, he shall render the estate to the heirs, in order to prevent such idiots from alienating their lands, and their heirs from being disinherited."

"By the old common law, there is a writ *de idiota inquirendo*, to inquire whether a man be an idiot or not, which must be tried by a jury of twelve men; and if they find him *purus idiota*, the profits of his lands and the custody of his person may be granted by the king to some subject, who hath interest enough to gain them. This branch of the revenue hath been long considered as a hardship upon private families; and so long ago as in the 9 Jac. I, it was under the consideration of parliament, to vest this custody in the relations of the party, and to settle an equivalent on the crown in lieu of it, it being then proposed to share the same fate with the slavery of the feudal tenures, which has been since abolished. Yet few instances can be given of the oppressive exertion of it, since it seldom happens that a jury finds a man an idiot *a nativitate*, but only *non compos mentis* from some particular time, which has an operation very different in point of law."—1st Blackstone, Com. 303, 304.

He says further on, "A man is not an idiot if he hath any glimmering of reason, so that he can tell his parents, his age, or the like common matters. But a man who is born deaf and dumb and blind, is looked upon by the law as in the same state with an idiot; he being supposed incapable of any understanding, as wanting all those senses which furnish human beings with ideas."

Laura Bridgman and Oliver Caswell, would not agree to this definition.

The laws of Massachusetts declare, that idiots shall be considered as "insane persons;" but they do not enlighten us any further.\*

The difficulties are sometimes practical. The public officers are often in doubt whether they should or should not interfere and forbid the banns of marriage between parties, one or both of whom are evidently simpletons and possibly idiots.

The definitions in medical books, do not furnish any more satisfactory explanation. They tell us "idiot" is derived from the terse old Greek word *ιδιος*, an individual who stands aloof from political or social affairs, in dreadful isolation from human intercourse; but if so, then it has been perverted from its original meaning. Besides, many idiots have some of the social affections fully developed. They tenderly love a mother or a sister.

Medical writers usually consider idiocy as a species of insanity. Dr. Good establishes the order PHRENICA, diseases of the brain, and subdivides it into six genera, the last of which is MOIRA, and is subdivided into two species:—1st, IMBECILLIS, imbecility, containing four varieties,—1st, stupiditas; 2d, amentia, forgetfulness; 3d, credulitas; 4th, inconstantia. The 2d species, DEMENS, irrationality, has 3 varieties,—1st, stultitia, folly,

\* The words, "insane person," shall be construed to include every idiot, non compos, lunatic, and distracted person.—*Revised Statutes of Mass.*, part 1st, chap. 2d, sect. 6th.

The words, "insane person," are intended to include every idiot, non compos, lunatic, and distracted person; and the word, "spendthrift," is intended to include every one who is liable to be put under guardianship on account of excessive drinking, gaming, idleness, or debauchery; and these words shall be so construed in all the provisions relating to guardians and wards, contained in this or any other statute.—*Ibid.* part 2, chap. 79, sect. 34.



silliness; 2d, larema, dotage, superannuation; 3d, anoea, idiotism. Here we have 6 genera, 15 species, and 27 varieties of mental disease.

Dr. Ray, one of the best modern authorities, gives two great divisions of insanity, thus:—

Insanity,	Defective development of the faculties.	Idiocy,	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resulting from congenital defect.</li> <li>2. Resulting from an obstacle to the development of the faculties supervening in infancy.</li> </ol>
	Lesion of the faculties subsequent to their development.	Imbecility,	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resulting from congenital defect.</li> <li>2. Resulting from an obstacle to the development of the faculties supervening in infancy.</li> </ol>
		Mania,	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intellectual, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. General.</li> <li>2. Partial.</li> </ol></li> <li>Affective, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. General.</li> <li>2. Partial.</li> </ol></li> </ol>
		Dementia.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consecutive to mania, or injuries of the brain.</li> <li>2. Senile, peculiar to old age.</li> </ol>

The common reader would be led, by these definitions, to suppose that the idiot was a diseased man, which, however true it may be in a scientific point of view, is not always true in the popular one. The idiot has “defective development of the faculties;” granted: but does this constitute disease? Many men are born with defective development of the bones of the upper extremities; their hands and fingers are unnaturally short: does this necessarily make them diseased?

All classifications or definitions which lead people to treat idiocy as a disease, in the common acceptance of the word, are of injurious tendency. Instances will be given, in our enumeration, of cases where the most violent and absurd external appliances have been made with a view of curing idiocy; such as attempts to harden the brain, and make it *retain ideas*, by steeping the head for whole months in tan poultices.

The celebrated Esquirol has given one of the most acceptable definitions. He says, “*idiocy is not a disease; it is a condition in which the intellectual faculties have never developed themselves,*

*or have not developed themselves enough to enable the person to receive the instruction common to those of his age and station in life."*

If we accept this definition, we shall find that sometimes a person would be considered an idiot in one town, and under the care of ordinary persons, who, in another town, and under the care of wise and good men, would not be considered an idiot, but only a feeble-minded person.

Then there are different degrees of idiocy; there is the idiot, properly speaking—the unfortunate creature who has hearing, but seems not to hear; sight, but seems not to see; who never learns to talk; who cannot put on his own clothes, or feed himself with a spoon, or learn to do the simplest thing. There is the *imbecile*, who cannot take care of himself at all, but can do pretty well under the directions of others. There is the simpleton, who thinks he is a man, and who hangs on the skirts of society, the victim of some and the butt of others, until at last he comes upon the public for support, and usually degenerates into idiocy as he advances in age.

The books on metaphysics, furnish even less satisfaction. In truth, much of the obscurity which prevails upon the subject arises from the natural vanity which makes metaphysical writers attempt to establish an entire difference in kind, between the human intelligence which God has given to man, and that which He bestowed upon the other creatures brought into being by his creative power and love. They say that instinct is one thing, and reason another; that animals are always governed by instinct; men never. But, in examining the lowest links in the chain of humanity, cases are found where human beings are incited to action by pure instinct; they do things without instruction and without previous experience, which *give them no pleasure*, but which are important for some ulterior end. Such cases will be referred to afterwards. On the other hand, some of the higher animals are more richly endowed with the knowing and reasoning faculties, than some men; they perceive, compare and choose; they exercise forethought, judgment and caution more than some idiots, who are nevertheless endowed with some of the human affections.



The difficulty is further increased by metaphysicians insisting upon our considering the mind as a unit, and not admitting the plurality and independence of its faculties.

We have referred to several cases in which idiots manifested some one of the intellectual faculties in considerable activity. Still another may be mentioned, case No. 30. He is a young man of twenty years old; an idiot beyond all question. He can write all the letters of the alphabet with great skill; that is, he can copy them, but he cannot put them together into words. He has, moreover, considerable skill in *drawing*. With a piece of charcoal, he will draw the figure of a man so correctly that his likenesses may often be recognized. Will it be said this is mere imitation; but why cannot he imitate tunes as the other idiot above mentioned does; or why cannot that other imitate forms as this one does? A reference to the cases in our appendix will show many others in which idiots who are inferior in mere intellect to some animals,—who have less cunning than the fox, less skill than the beaver, less forethought than the elephant,—do nevertheless manifest germs of the truly human faculties, such as the most sagacious animal could never manifest if it lived a century, and were taught by the most cunning teachers.

The truth seems to be, that, while animals have the elements of the “reasoning faculties,” they have none whatever of those nobler faculties, such as the religious sense, the conscience, the hope of immortality, and the like, which make men more especially the sons of God. It is the possession of higher faculties which are superadded to reason, and not reason itself, which makes men a little lower, indeed, than the angels, but immeasurably higher than the brutes, and constitutes the real distinction between them. The reason of the brutes, how contemptuously soever we may call it “instinct,” differs from our reason not in kind, but only in degree.

It may be supposed, from the tenor of our remarks, that we are not much disposed to draw any sharp line of distinction between idiots and other human beings, and still less disposed to deny them the attributes of humanity, and sink them to a level with the brutes. Indeed, if they have not even the germs of

the peculiarly human faculties, then are they, though made in God's image, far lower than the brutes ; for many brutes have more intelligence and indeed more reasoning power, than the idiots of the lowest grade. We agree with Esquirol, that idiocy is not a disease. We go farther, and maintain that it is impossible to fix the point at which idiocy ends and reason begins. The truth is, that extreme cases only are considered in general classifications, and this leads to the popular belief, that distinctions do exist between them, which really differ only as more and less.

When a man's skin begins to feel a little dry, and he is rather thirsty, and his pulse is a very little quickened, and he feels rather ill at ease, we say he is somewhat unwell, but has no disease ;—but when all these symptoms have increased in severity, until his skin is as dry as a drum-head, and his tongue rattles like a bit of baked leather in his parched mouth, and his hot blood is jerked rapidly through his tense and turgid arteries, then we say he has a fever ; but no one can fix the point at which the indisposition ends, and the fever begins.

So it is with the imperfect development of intelligence of idiots : they all manifest some degree of sense and understanding ; and the difference between their intelligence, and that of other men, is a difference in *degree*, and not in *kind*.

The light of a candle strikes the eye of the most stupid idiot, and causes sensation, perhaps thought, as of his supper ; the light of a star strikes the eye of a scholar, and produces sensation, perhaps thought, as of a parallax. From the most stupid idiot up to the most brilliant genius, the distance is immense ; but every step of that distance is occupied. We have names to mark the idiot, the fool, the simpleton, the weak-minded, the man of common sense, the strong-minded man, the man of talent, and the man of genius ; but for the thousand intermediate grades, we have no name, though we admit their existence.

Now, we claim for idiots a place in the human family. We maintain that they have the germs of the human faculties and sentiments, which in most cases may be developed. Indeed, the number of persons left by any society in a state of idiocy, is one test of the degree of advancement of that society in true and Christian civilization.



If savages, who are deemed persons of common sense, among the Charibs and Feegeans, were brought into Massachusetts, any jury called upon a writ *de idiota inquirendo*, would render a verdict of *purus idiota de nativitate*, and put them under guardianship.

If the majority of the people were educated up to the highest conceivable point of intelligence and morality, would not thousands who are now considered as persons of good common sense, and even *sharp men*, be put under guardianship as mental or moral idiots?

No matter how low may be the condition of an idiot, he should not be left without some attempts at instruction; for, surely, creatures made in the human form cannot be an exception to that universal and beneficent provision which makes all organized beings, even oysters, capable of cultivation and improvement; and there is required of us only love enough, and patience and perseverance enough, to improve their mental and moral, as well as their bodily condition materially.

Mr. Seguin, in his valuable work, discountenances the idea of considering the intellectual incapacity as the distinguishing mark of idiocy; and one would be cautious about venturing an opinion against such high authority, were it not too evident that he is rather disposed to disparage every thing said or done by others besides himself. The value of his great labors is somewhat lessened by this; for it lessens our confidence in his impartiality. He is unconsciously biased in judgment. Besides, when he is giving descriptions of individual idiots, to illustrate his subject, he always places their manifestations of intelligence in the foreground of the picture. Speaking of the "most stupid," he says, "this one will not venture down a flight of steps, because *he does not know how* to bend the joint, to keep his balance in the movement, or to measure the distance from the step on which he stands to the one below it."\*

The want of an ordinary degree of intelligence is indeed only *one* of the effects of the original morbid cause; it is only one of several symptoms, the whole of which, taken together, constitute

\* "Traitement Moral Hygiene et Education des Idiois, &c." Paris, 1848.

what we call *Idiocy*; but, in a *human being*, it is the principal or leading one, because intelligence is one of the distinguishing attributes of humanity. The morbid condition of the brain and nervous system, which *causes* all the phenomena of idiocy, may exist in brutes,\* and, in their case, we might select some other symptom, such as the want of muscular contractility, for the distinguishing characteristic; but, in man, what concerns us most to know is the intellect.

Besides, Mr. Seguin's own definition, although it is one of the best, is by no means free from the objections which he brings against the definitions of others. He says: *Idiocy is an infirmity of the nervous system, which has the effect of removing the organs and faculties of the child from under the control of the WILL, and giving him up to the dominion of his instinct, and cutting him off from the moral world.*

This definition includes the statement of the supposed cause of idiocy, but does not give the symptoms by which it may be recognized. It supposes the WILL to be an independent faculty, and to remain intact, but deprived of power, because its minister, the nervous system, is infirm. Here is one of the consequences of the want of sound philosophy as a basis, and one which may lead to errors in its practical application to the treatment of idiots. The WILL is an independent faculty, or it is not; if it is, then the same morbid affection of the nervous system, which impairs all the other faculties, must impair this; if it is not an independent faculty, but the result of the action of other faculties,—the desire which *prevails*, for the time, over all other desires,—then the weakness or derangement of the other faculties would derange it; so that, in either case, it is no more philosophical to say, that idiocy exists because the organs and faculties are removed from under the control of the will, than it would be to say, that the will is so infirm as not to be able to control those organs and faculties. It is no more the fault of the horses for running away with the carriage, than it is the fault of the driver for not having skill and strength enough to guide them.

\* We have known some cases, where animals were so deficient in *intelligence*, that, compared with other animals of their kind, they should be called fools,—simpletons,—if not idiots.



Dr. Ray considers idiocy to be "*that condition of the mind, in which the reflective, and all, or part, of the affective powers, are either entirely wanting, or are manifested to the slightest possible extent.*"\* The remarks of this keen observer and able writer, on this subject, should be studied by all who are interested in the care of idiotic or weak-minded persons.

There is, then, great confusion among writers as to what constitutes idiocy; but there is even greater confusion as to the different kinds of idiocy. Seguin makes two kinds: *deep-seated idiocy*, and *superficial idiocy*. But notwithstanding all his attempts at division, the difference seems to be only one of more or less.

The attempt to show the difference between idiocy, imbecility, and other affections, which are sometimes classed together, is not essential to the object of this report. It is only necessary to show what class of persons are designated as idiots, in the remarks that will follow. Without pretending, then, to any scientific accuracy, idiocy may be defined to be *that condition of a human being in which, from some morbid cause in the bodily organization, the faculties and sentiments remain dormant or undeveloped, so that the person is incapable of self-guidance, and of approaching that degree of knowledge usual with others of his age*. There may be all degrees of this condition—from the simpleton, who cannot be taught the rudiments of knowledge as other children are taught, down to the driveling idiot, who cannot be taught to speak, to walk, or even to retain the saliva in his mouth.

*Intellectual* idiocy is the condition in which all, or several, of the intellectual faculties are so far dormant or undeveloped, as to prevent the person from perceiving, comparing, and understanding impressions with any thing like the usual degree of accuracy. It is to the class of persons in this condition, that the following report principally refers.

*Moral* idiocy is that condition in which the sentiments, the conscience, the religious feeling, the love of neighbor, the sense of beauty, and the like, are so far dormant or undeveloped, as to incapacitate the person from being a law unto himself, in

\* The Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity, p. 68.

any thing like the degree which is usual with others of his age. This, it is evident, may, and often does, exist, while the intellectual faculties are quite active. The condition and treatment of the large and unfortunate class of persons, who would be included in this definition, will not, of course, be considered in this report, but they cannot be passed over without a remark. Idiots of this character are not found in our almshouses, but they are often found in our prisons. Dr. Voisin relates a most affecting case of a young man, chained in a gang of galley-slaves, whom he found to be, beyond all question, an idiot. Dr. Rush says that he has known several cases of *moral imbecility*. In speaking of them, he says, without regard to any theory, but with the philosophical shrewdness so characteristic of the man, "*In all these cases, there is probably an original defective organization in those parts of the body which are occupied by the moral faculties of the mind.*"

The remarks of Dr. Ray upon this subject are full of deep meaning, whether he intended to give it to them or not. He says, speaking of Dr. Rush's explanation of moral imbecility, "it will receive but little countenance in an age that derives its ideas of mental phenomena from exclusive observation of mind in an acknowledged state of health and vigor. To understand these cases properly, requires a knowledge of our moral and intellectual constitution, to be obtained only by a practical acquaintance with the innumerable phases of the mind, as presented in its various degrees of strength and weakness, of health and disease, and all its transitions, from brutish idiocy to the most commanding intellect." \*

In the days of darkness with regard to material phenomena, the attempt to obtain knowledge of the functions of life and health, by examining diseased persons, or dissecting dead bodies, was pronounced impious by the learned doctors; and, in our days of darkness with regard to moral and intellectual phenomena, the attempts to throw light upon healthy mental manifestations by examining diseased or defective manifestations, are forbidden by metaphysicians who study only their own minds in order to understand the minds of others.

\* The Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity, p. 87.



But, to return to the notice of different kinds of idiocy, of which intellectual and moral have been mentioned. It may be supposed that a third class can be found, as, for instance, *animal idiocy*, but this can hardly be said to exist. Nature takes such care to ensure the continuance of life, and the procreation of the species, that, whatever faculties, sentiments, and affections may be wanting, the animal appetites are always there. We once saw a poor creature, grown to the stature of man, who never knew enough to balance himself in a chair, or to speak a word. Sometimes, in cramming food into his mouth with his fingers, he would catch them between his teeth, and howl with the pain, and still bite harder, the more he suffered, not knowing what hurt him. Yet this creature, this organism, so to call him, was so constructed as to ensure the continuance of his own life, provided the means were at hand. The intellect to provide the food was wanting; but, if others provided it, he could eat it, digest it, assimilate it, and grow.

One of the greatest difficulties in the consideration of this subject, is to distinguish between demented persons and idiots. In our lunatic asylums are found some, who are reduced to a state of complete idiocy, but who are not, strictly speaking, idiots; their minds have once been in the normal condition; they have lost their understanding; they are *demented*. It is not necessary, however, in a report like this, intended merely to promote a work of humanity, to be very precise about the definition of terms.

It was probably the intention of the legislature to use the word "idiot" in the popular and common sense. We have considered, therefore, all persons whose understanding is undeveloped, or developed only in a partial and very feeble degree, or who have lost their understanding, without becoming insane, to be proper subjects for examination. Of the 574 persons reported to us as idiotic, 420 may be considered as properly idiotic, for their feebleness of intellect is connate; while 154 have become idiotic after birth.

#### THE CONDITION AND CAPACITIES OF THE IDIOTS IN MASSACHUSETTS.

Confining our attention to the cases of real idiots, above mentioned, viz.—420 out of 574,—it is found that 188 are under

25 years of age. Of these, 172 seem capable of improvement; they present proper cases for attempts at instruction, and the formation of regular, industrious, and cleanly habits. Only 16 seem incapable of improvement. Of those over 25 years of age, there are 73 who seem capable of little or no improvement in mental condition. Of the whole number, 19 can now earn their board and clothing, under the management of discreet persons; 141 do earn their board, when properly managed; 110 can do trifling work, if carefully watched and directed; 73 are as helpless as children of 7 years old; 43 are as helpless as children of 2 years old, and 34 are as utterly helpless as little infants.

With regard to pecuniary circumstances, 20 have property of their own, held by guardians; 26 belong to wealthy families; 196 belong to indigent families, but are not public paupers; 148 are town or state paupers; the rest are sometimes aided by the public, sometimes not. Of the whole number,—viz. 574,—there are 220 at town or state charge.

Of the 420 idiots proper, 218 are insatiable gluttons; and 102 are known to be given to self-abuse in a frightful degree.

For further information, we refer to the cases in the appendix, and to the tables, and proceed to consider the

#### CONDITION AND TREATMENT OF OUR IDIOTS.

In order to form a just idea upon this subject, we purposely made our examinations of idiots in nearly one hundred towns, situated in various parts of the Commonwealth, from the seashore to the western line. Of the whole number examined, 220 were town or state paupers, and mostly kept in the almshouses. These will be first spoken of. They are of all sorts and grades of idiocy, from the mere simpleton, who cannot take care of himself, or his own affairs, down to the drivelling idiot, who wallows in his filth. They are of all ages, from the youth, who is entering upon his dark and cheerless pilgrimage of life, without more thought of his relations with man, or his duty to God than a young animal, up to the old man, who is closing his career without a knowledge of the joys and sorrows of the world which he leaves behind him, and without a thought about his lot in that before him. Some are comparatively free



from the dominion of animal lust and appetite, and are mild, affectionate, and docile; others are a helpless prey to dreadful passions, depraved appetites, and disgusting propensities. Some are evidently susceptible of great improvement; they desire instruction, and might be rescued from the terrible fate before them; while others are so cruelly blasted in the very bud, are so utterly shorn of human capacities,—are such complete abortions,—that little can be done except to render their animal existence as decent and comfortable as possible.

But, greatly as the bodily and mental condition of these poor creatures varies, and whatever may be their capacity for improvement, their treatment and their fate are, for the most part, the same. They need more careful treatment, more judicious associates, and more skilful training, than any other persons; for, even with all these advantages, their chance for development of their human faculties, and their restoration to human society, is small; what then can it be, when, deprived of them, and thrust into the almshouses, they are left, without any special care and instruction, to associate with ignorant paupers and broken-down drunkards?

#### TREATMENT OF IDIOTS IN OUR ALMSHOUSES.

With very few exceptions, they are kindly treated in the almshouses. There is reason to believe that a great change has been made for the better, in this respect, within a few years.

The interest that has been manifested in lunatics, and the substitution of kindness and moral influence for the hard treatment and blows, which were formerly so common, has been of benefit to idiots also. Thus we see that good is contagious as well as evil; and kindness and love, extended to one class of men, is sure to benefit others. In many places, it was found, that the partial report, made by your commissioners the last year, had been received and read by keepers of almshouses; and that they had changed their views with regard to the best mode of treating idiots, in consequence of the statement there put forth. It is gratifying to be able to state that no instance of cruel, or wilfully unkind treatment of idiots, by the keepers of any alms-

houses, were met with. In most cases, the overseers of the poor have given orders for the idiots to be treated with kindness.

In a few instances, men of strong natural sense and of humanity, reflecting that idiots of the lowest grade do not differ materially in intelligence from the higher animals, have ceased to blame or punish them, for waywardness or misbehavior, any more than they would punish cows for the like causes, and they have substituted kindness of treatment and constant employment for the old modes of punishment and confinement. But though there is no *intentional* cruelty or unkindness practised towards idiots in our almshouses, there is, in many cases, a most deplorable ignorance of their true condition and wants, which leads to dreadful consequences.

Many a child who was only simple, and whom kind and wise parents would have trained up to intelligent manhood, has become an orphan, has been thrown into the almshouse, and then neglected and mismanaged, until the feeble light of reason has gone out, and left him in the darkness and hopelessness of idiocy. A great many half-witted persons, when first sent to the almshouses, have vicious and debasing habits, which are still curable, but which are neglected and allowed to grow rampant, until all moral sense and all decency are gone, and the poor victims become drivelling idiots. In some almshouses, from want of sufficient force of character on the part of the keepers, or from want of sufficient help to enforce the discipline, the unfortunate idiots are the butts and the tools of the rest of the inmates. In some such cases, they are not only grossly mismanaged, but terribly abused. Sometimes, for want of proper buildings, the separation of the sexes cannot be strictly maintained, and, of course, the whole moral atmosphere of the house is tainted. What hope can there be, in such cases, for the poor youth who is partially idiotic; what prospect is there for him, but that of gradually sinking down to the level with the brutes? Is such the manner in which the public should discharge the sacred responsibility which devolves upon it, when it assumes the place and the duties of parent and guardian to the orphan and the destitute?



## CLEANLINESS.

The deplorable ignorance or negligence manifested in the treatment of idiots in our almshouses, is shown most strikingly in the neglect of personal cleanliness. Nothing is more important to their bodily and mental health, than the free and frequent use of cold bathing. There is hardly a case in which it does not work like a charm in strengthening the nervous system, and increasing the command over all the voluntary muscles. And yet the idiots, in a great many of our almshouses, are disgustingly filthy. They change their body and bed-linen only once a week, and never bathe except when caught in a rain-storm. The consequence is, that their bodies are covered with scurf; and the scrofulous humors, with which they are almost all afflicted, are aggravated to deadly intensity, by the re-absorption from their clothing of the excretions which the system throws off. The sensible and insensible perspiration are really *excrementitious matters*, and should be so regarded; they are the *debris*, the *waste* of the body, and should be removed. In all persons they are totally unfit for any of the purposes of the animal economy, and should not remain in contact with the surface. In some persons, they are disgusting and deadly poisons. A man in high and robust health, who changes his linen daily, may neglect bathing with comparative impunity, because the skin keeps itself clean for a long time; it vigorously repels the foreign matters upon its surface; but not so those who are feeble, or whose functions are any way deranged. Day by day, and year by year, the health is impaired by the pernicious effects of covering up the body with thick clothing, which, while it prevents the invigorating action of the air upon the skin, presses into contact with the mouths of its absorbent vessels, the excrementitious matters, and forces more or less of re-absorption to take place. This may not be the true physiological explanation of the evil effects of neglecting the skin, which, however, are manifest and undeniable, and most of which are removed by daily bathing the whole body with cold water.

It is important to dwell upon this subject, because there is the most astonishing and deplorable ignorance about it in our

community. Some keepers of our almshouses seem to think that a man need be washed only twice in this world, once by the nurse before she puts on his swaddling-clothes, and once again before she puts on his grave-clothes. They are confirmed, perhaps, in this, by the flippant wiseacres, who, wrapped complacently in a year's coating of scurf, say that a man must be a dirty fellow who needs bathing every day. If the almshouse is far removed from any pond or river, in which the inmates bathe for pleasure during the hot weather, the only ablutions required of them are performed by dipping the hands daily in cold water, and rubbing them over the face; and on Sunday, perhaps, by *working down with a little soap*, to the white skin about the neck and ears. They go upon the doctrine that those parts only which are exposed need be clean; in which they are practically sustained by thousands of refined people, who, if they should break an ankle in a brilliant ball-room, and require to have their stocking drawn off before the company, would be more pained by the exposure of the state of the foot and toes, than by the accident itself; or, at least, they ought to be. If those who protest against the necessity of daily bathing, would only reflect upon the nature of the covering in which they case the body, they would see that the skin should no more be kept in contact with matters which it has once thrown off as excrementitious, than should the lungs be presented again and again with the air which has once been thrown out by them. No man would like to inhale the breath which has just been exhaled by another, *if he knew it*; he would not like to wear linen bathed in another man's perspiration, and yet, the breath and the perspiration of another man are not a whit worse than his own.

However, our business is only with known and avowed idiots, who are not responsible for their habits of body, and who are at public charge. In a very few almshouses, they are obliged to bathe often, but, in nine tenths of the cases, they are disgustingly filthy.

Now cleanliness is of especial importance to idiots. Like other persons, they need it as one of the minor virtues of morality; as a virtue which is essential to decent self-respect, and



as a means for preserving and restoring health. Moreover, they, in an especial manner, require the frequent shock of cold water upon the surface of the body, as a direct aid to other attempts which should be constantly made for increasing their command over the action of the voluntary muscles. The want of power over the nerves and muscles is often one of the most striking features of idiocy. It is sometimes so entire that idiots cannot hold themselves erect. The restoration or the increase of this power should always be kept in view in their hygienic treatment. The total neglect of all these considerations, and the filthy condition of body in which these orphans are kept by the public, who is their guardian, is one of the many indications of the necessity of a change in their condition. Another is found in gross errors which are so common with respect to the

#### ALIMENTATION OR FEEDING OF IDIOTS.

Every one who is at all conversant with physiology, knows the importance of adapting the diet to the nature and condition of the bodily organization. What is good for one man, may be very bad for another. A quantity which one man can consume with benefit to himself, during a year spent in the open air and in constant exercise, may, if consumed in a year of sedentary and idle life, be laying the foundations of fatal disease. The man whose brain and nervous system are in a high state of activity should use animal food very differently from the man whose brain is sluggish, and whose muscular system is largely developed. Now, the farther a man's system is from the normal standard of health, the more caution is required in regard to his diet. An error or an excess, which a healthy man hardly feels, affects a feeble one severely. Idiots are almost always in an abnormal condition of health. Their brain and nervous system are generally deficient in volume and in tone. Their diet may be such as to amend this condition,—to increase the tone and vigor of the nervous centres,—or it may be such as to produce exactly the opposite effect, and to aggravate all their troubles.

Unfortunately, the considerations named above, are seldom,

if ever, regarded in our almshouses ; and the idiots are fed just as the other paupers are. A weak, nervous, and idle idiot, to whom gross animal food is like poison, is fed upon fat pork, when pork is cooked for the hearty laborers who have been working out in the fields. Moreover, idiots are apt to have morbid appetites, which lead them to devour the most filthy and disgusting garbage. Instead of treating these morbid appetites as diseases, the keepers sometimes punish the idiots, with just as much reason as they would beat a man who had the jaundice, for seeing things yellow. More often, however, no thought is bestowed about their diet, and the unfortunate creatures sometimes fill their stomachs with the most injurious substances, which are not aliments.

Sometimes these morbid appetites are encouraged, and idiots are permitted to take substances of a poisonous nature. Case No. 63 is that of an idiot whose friends allow him twenty pounds of strong chewing tobacco annually. This quantity he actually *eats*,—not merely chewing it and spitting it out again, but swallowing the juice, and the very substance of the tobacco, without ever spitting at all. The quantity which he sometimes swallows in one day, if it had been retained upon the stomach the first day he began to use tobacco, would probably have killed him outright. So, indeed, as for the matter of that, it might have killed him upon the first day's trial, if, instead of swallowing it, like an idiot, he had only chewed it in the manner approved by wise chewers, who carefully express the juice, and roll it about the mouth until its force is expended upon the nerves, and through them upon the brain, and who then cast sway the *quid*, as tasteless and powerless. The wonder that the idiot is not killed by what he swallows is diminished if one considers that he has only to imitate other chewers, and masticate his morsel long enough, so that what is left will be hardly stronger than oak-bark. The fact of spitting or not does not make much difference, because what is expectorated is not the narcotic and poisonous principle of the tobacco, but only the saliva stained by the coloring matter of the plant ; the poisonous principle is impalpable, and acts upon the extremities of the nerves, and, through them, upon the sys-



tem. Moreover, there is no more *apparent* and *immediate* ill effect in the case of the idiotic, than there is in the case of the wise chewers, or of men who effect the same sort of excitement to the brain and nervous system, by the use of opium or alcohol.

But the greatest injury arises from gross ignorance of those principles of physiology which should be observed, with regard to the *quantity* of food consumed by idiots. The animal propensities are very active in these half-developed beings. They are exceedingly prone to gluttony, and if allowed to eat as much as they choose, they will so gorge themselves, that the whole nervous energy will be expended in digesting, and none be left to stimulate the brain to activity. Any man who attempts to make a strong mental effort while he is digesting a very heavy dinner, feels that the two operations cannot well go on together; his stomach generally carries the day; it draws off all the nervous force from the brain, and his head nods; or if, by desperate effort, he summons the fluid to his brain, and makes that digest thought, then the digestion of the dinner is apt to be imperfect. Now in idiots, the stomach and digestive organs may be in full activity, while the brain is very small and feeble. If they are left to indulge freely in the gluttonous habits which they are apt to form, the brain is starved, while the stomach is over-fed.

By reference to the tables in the appendix, it will be seen that, out of 444 idiots, who were examined upon this point, 280 were ravenous in their appetites, and gluttonous in their habits. Representing the average consumption of food by adults by ten, it is found, that, among these idiots, the consumption must be represented by  $14\frac{1}{2}$ .

Our idiots then are over-fed; they are generally allowed to eat as much as they choose at the table, and then in many cases, they prowl about, and pick up what they can, cheating even the pigs by stealing the apple-parings, crusts, and the like, from the swill-pail.

This undue allowance of food is given, of course, through mistaken kindness. They are considered as children; and it is known that healthy children will not hurt themselves by eat-

ing too much food, if it be perfectly plain, and not made bewitching by sweets, by spices, or by the cunning craft of cookery. But children have to supply by food, not only the daily waste of the body, but every ounce of increase in their growth. When this growth ceases, the mental powers are developed, and reason tells the man he must not eat as he did when a youth. But to the poor idiot the growth of reason comes not at all; and he continues to gratify his mere sense of taste, by gorging his stomach with the usual quantity of food, long after his growth has ceased, and so over-taxes his system by a worse than useless load of food, that he has no energy left for any thing else than getting rid of it.

In very few of our almshouses is there the inclination, or the means, of putting a stop to the debasing habit of body to which almost all idiots are passionately addicted, and which, more than all other things together, degrades them below the brutes, and keeps them there.

This is a subject so disagreeable in its nature, that one would be spared any consideration of it; but it is the root of so much evil, it causes so many cases of total idiocy, so many more of imbecility, and affects, in a lesser degree, so many thousands of our youth, weakening and debasing the mental and bodily powers, that it will be again alluded to in the appendix.

#### EXERCISE.

Another striking defect in the treatment of idiots, is the neglect of regular and severe exercise. It is beginning to be seen, in a few almshouses, that if a man is kept hard at work all day, he is not only less mischievous, but he lies down tired at night, and sleeps soundly till morning. Some of the keepers of the houses have the ability to address the proper motives to their half-witted inmates, and to keep them constantly employed, and the effect is seen, in a few years, in the improved bodily and mental condition. But as in common schools, some masters of superior ability and tact, can preserve order, and promote diligent study, by appeals to high motives, while others can only do so by blows upon the soul and blows upon the body, so some masters of almshouses are followed round to any work,



and fawned upon, by idiots, as dogs fawn upon a beloved master, while others can extort from them only a scanty task, by scolding and by stripes.

It is beginning to be so well understood that beating, and punishment of any kind, inflicted upon idiots with a view to making them work, is bad policy, that the overseers of the poor, in most towns, have forbidden the keepers of almshouses to resort to them. Some have done so, doubtless, from feelings of humanity, but others from considerations of economy; for they say, the time and pains necessary to be expended by keepers and overseers, is not paid for by the reluctant labor performed by the idiots.

The consequence is, that the poor creatures are left in the house, or yard, while the keepers and the able-bodied men are away, at work upon the "poor's farm." Of course, the idiots are called upon by the women to do small chores, which they perform in a slipshod manner; or they are made game of by the lazy slubber-de-gillions, who are found in every poorhouse; or they bask in the sun, and indulge in unseemly habits.

As for instruction, there is not a single almshouse within our knowledge, we believe there is not one in the State, or country, in which any systematic attempts are made to develop the feeble mental and moral faculties of idiots; in a word, there is no school for those who, more than all others, need one.

On the whole then, after excepting five or six almshouses, in which the idiots are treated both kindly and wisely, the general condition of those at the public charge is most deplorable. They are filthy, gluttonous, lazy, and given up to abominations of various kinds. They not only do not improve, but they sink deeper and deeper,—while under the public care,—into bodily depravity and mental degradation. It is true that this is the result of ignorance, rather than of any unkindness; but the plea of ignorance can no longer save us from the sin and disgrace; for it is now proved, by triumphant experience, in France, Switzerland, and Prussia, that idiots may be trained to habits of industry, cleanliness, and self-respect; that the highest of them may be measurably restored to self-control, and that the very lowest of them may be lifted from the slough of animal pollution to the platform of humanity.

## CONDITION OF IDIOTS IN PRIVATE FAMILIES.

Bad however as is the condition of the idiots who are at public charge, and gross as is the ignorance of those who have the care of them, about their real wants and capacities, we are constrained to say, that the condition of those in private houses is still worse, and the ignorance of the relatives and friends who have charge of them, is still more profound.

This is not to be wondered at, when we consider that idiots are generally born of a very poor stock,—of parents who are subject to some disorders of the brain, or who are scrofulous and puny, to the last degree, themselves. (This will be enlarged upon, in speaking of the causes of idiocy.)

Such persons are generally very feeble in intellect, poor in purse, and intemperate in habits. A great many of them are hardly able to take care of themselves. They are unfit to teach or train common children; how much less idiots, whose education is the most difficult of all! On the other hand, the masters of almshouses, and their wives, are generally intelligent and responsible persons; and though they are, of course, ignorant of the art of training idiots, they will not permit such enormous errors as are common among the parents of idiotic children.

We have ascertained (mainly, by personal observation) the condition of 354 idiotic persons, who are not town or State paupers. Of these there may be, at the most, five who are treated very judiciously, who are taught by wise and discreet persons, and whose faculties and capacities are developed to their fullest extent.

The rest are generally in a most deplorable state, as to their bodily, mental, and moral treatment.

One would hardly be credited, if he should put down half the instances of gross ignorance manifested by parents, in this enlightened community, in the treatment of their idiotic children. Sometimes they find that the children seem to comprehend what they hear, but soon forget it; hence they conclude that the brain is soft, and cannot retain impressions, and then they cover the head with cold poultices of oak-bark, in order to tan, or harden, the fibres. Others, finding that it is exceedingly dif-

up the openings.

Worse still are the numerous cases where the parents encourage the ravenous gluttony of their children by all sorts of stimulants to the appetite. They say, the poor creatures have few things which they can enjoy in this world,—that food is one of these, and that they shall have as much as they can eat of it.

Still more deplorable, and hardly to be credited,—except by eye-witnesses,—is the blind infatuation which makes parents regard with indifference, or even complacency, a vicious habit of their children, which is disgusting in its nature, and dreadfully degrading in its consequences. Some even make no concealment of this habit; they point it out to the sickened stranger, and, going to the Bible for justification, they say complacently that their child resembles Solomon in early virility. Such is the dreadful effect of ignorance, that even religion is warped to the support of that which it utterly forbids and condemns!



Nothing can afford a stronger argument in favor of an institution for the proper training and teaching of idiots, and the dissemination of information upon the subject, than the striking difference manifested in the condition of the few children who are properly cared for, and judiciously treated, and those who are neglected or abused. There are cases in our community of youths who are idiotic from birth, but who, under proper care and training, have become cleanly in person, quiet in deportment, industrious in habits, and who would almost pass in society for persons of common intelligence, and yet their natural capacities were no greater than others, who, from ignorance, or neglect of their parents, have become filthy, gluttonous, lazy, vicious, depraved, and are rapidly sinking into drivelling idiocy.

This fact alone should be enough to encourage the State to take measures at once for the establishment of a school or institution for teaching and training idiots, if it were but a matter

## EUROPEAN SCHOOLS FOR IDIOTS.

It is a singular and interesting fact, that the first regular attempt, upon record, to educate an idiot, was made with a view to prove the truth of the theory of the sensualist school of philosophy, which was so much in favor in France during the revolution.

A wild boy who had been found in the forest, was brought to Paris, and became famous, as the Savage of Aveyron. Great was the delight of the wise men, when they found that this man could not speak any human tongue, and was devoid of understanding and knowledge.

The celebrated Itard undertook to teach him, and it was expected that he would prove, that all our ideas are derived immediately from the senses, and that our mental faculties are only sensations transformed. According to the theory, by causing certain sensations, certain ideas would be generated, and from these a given kind of character produced. No one was better fitted than Itard for giving the experiment a fair trial, and he labored as hard as a man can, whose feet are upon moving sand. But it was all in vain, and would have been nearly in vain under any system, for it became evident that the supposed savage was only an idiot. Itard however was not merely a philosopher,—he was a man of humanity; he became interested in his subject, and followed up his attempts to instruct this poor creature, with great zeal and great ability, for several years; and his labor was not lost. He saw what might be done for idiots, and his thoughts and hints have been since acted upon by a disciple worthy of such a master,—Mr. Edward Séguin.

In 1824 Dr. Belhomme, of Paris, wrote an able and interesting pamphlet on idiots, and demanded, in the name of humanity, that something should be done for their education.

In 1828, Mons. Ferrus, President of the Academy of Medicine, and Inspector-General of the lunatic asylums of France, became interested in the condition of the idiots at the Bicêtre, one of the large hospitals for the insane, at Paris. He organized a school for the most intelligent of them, and tried to have them taught to read, write, and cipher, and also to be trained to habits of cleanliness and order.

Mr. Falret, excited doubtless to emulation in deeds of charity and love, attempted to teach some idiotic females, at the other great asylum, La Salpêtrière, in 1831.

Dr. Voisin, the celebrated physiologist, and able expounder of phrenology, was among the earliest to take part in these efforts for raising up the lowest rank of humanity from the brutish condition in which it had so long trailed. His writings are, perhaps, the most able and philosophical, in a scientific point of view, that have yet appeared upon this subject. In 1830 he published a most valuable essay, and has since published several others, in which are to be found the most satisfactory explanation of various phenomena of idiotism.

Nor did he aid the cause by his pen alone. In 1833, he attempted the organization of a school for idiots, in one of the Asylums Rue de Sèvres ; and, in 1834, opened a private school for idiotic children. In 1839, he was made physician to the great hospital of the Bicêtre, and, aided by Dr. Leuret, he renewed and enlarged the school for idiots, of which he still has the general superintendence, the principal teacher being Mr. Vallée. It is due, however, to Edward Séguin, to say that, to him more than to any other person, seems to be owing the great and rapid improvement which has been made in the *art* of teaching and training idiots. He had occupied himself with the subject for several years, and in 1842 took the immediate management of the school at Bicêtre, which however he did not retain. He has labored with that enthusiasm and zeal in a beloved subject, which almost always ensure success. He has put forth a degree of courage, energy and perseverance, which, if exerted in the art of destroying men and cities, would have covered his breast with those crosses, and decorations, and tawdry baubles, so highly prized by vulgar minds. But, how utterly worthless would be such tokens of excellence in a bloody and barbarous art, compared with the high reward of approving conscience, which must ever follow labors of love in the field of beneficence. We do not know that Séguin has even a title ; but surely one of field marshal, or peer of France, which may be given at the whim of a man, could never equal, in true honor, that of friend and benefactor of the most afflicted of the human race ; a title which he has



gained by long years of patient toil, and which will be held in honor when that of destroyer shall cease to be prized by any but barbarians.

We have felt bound to pay this tribute to these noble and generous men, for they have brought rapidly into a high degree of excellence the art of elevating and teaching a class of beings who were but yesterday regarded and treated, in France, as "*human brutes*," devoid of understanding and heart, whom the highest authorities in that country condemned to hopeless idiotism, who, in the rest of Europe, and, we are sorry to say, in this country also, are still left a prey to the dreadful propensities, which almost certainly sink them lower and lower in brutishness, until every trace of humanity is lost.

A brief notice of the principal schools for idiots will not be out of place here.

In 1843, the royal academy of science appointed a commission to examine Mr. Séguin's school. The commissioners were Messrs. Serres, Flourens, and Pariset,—names high on the roll of science. We translate some extracts from their report:—

\* \* \* "In order to form a just idea of idiots, suppose yourself to be introduced into the asylum which they inhabit, as Mons. Séguin was, to become their teacher. What a sight ! One is jumping about, bellowing and crying out ; another is crouching in a corner as silent and motionless as a statue. The first one whom you address runs chattering away ; the next keeps bowing to you, and kissing his hand ; a third makes signs of the cross all over his body ; a fourth lies flat upon the floor ; a fifth gnaws his fingers and laughs wildly."

"Not one can give an intelligible answer to your questions, so inarticulate is their voice. Further on are more hopeless idiots,—blind, epileptic, paralyzed. \* \* \* Eyes have they, but they see not ; ears have they, but they hear not. Their legs are unfit for standing, balancing the body, for walking, leaping or running. Their hands are unfit for feeling, seizing or moving things." \* \* \* "This being the case, an idiot of the lowest kind being the extreme of ignorance, brutishness and perverseness, it follows that to undertake his education is the most repulsive, and the most painful task." \* \* \*

Nevertheless, we are glad to declare that Mr. Séguin has, in a great measure, overcome all these difficulties. Gymnastic exercises properly varied have given to their muscles greater and more equalized power. Their senses are exercised so that their movements have more precision and accuracy; so that they have learned to subject the action of the organs to the will, a faculty unknown to them before."

"By modes of instruction, peculiarly his own, and of which the details would be out of place here, he has brought his pupils to a knowledge of letters, reading, writing, drawing, and of the elements of arithmetic and geometry. By comparison with different qualities of bodies, he has familiarized them with abstract ideas of color, density, weight, &c., and with ideas of higher relations, such as order, authority, obedience, and duty. By thus training his pupils to exercises of body and mind, he has made them more robust and more wise. He has created a temporary abandonment of their secret and pernicious habits, and may succeed in causing them to be forgotten."\*

Other testimonies from such men as Esquirol and Guersant, (père) might be given, but we will cite here that of an American gentleman, Mr. George Sumner. He sent us a very minute and interesting account of the Parisian school for idiots, which was embodied in our report last year, but we cannot do better than give some extracts from it here. He says:—

"During the past six months, I have watched, with eager interest, the progress which many young idiots have made, in Paris, under the direction of Mr. Séguin, and, at Bicêtre, under that of Messrs. Voisin and Vallée, and have seen, with no less gratification than astonishment, nearly one hundred fellow-beings who, but a short time since, were shut out from all communion with mankind, who were objects of loathing and disgust, many of whom rejected every article of clothing, others of whom, unable to stand erect, crouched themselves in corners, and gave signs of life only by piteous howls, others, in whom the faculty of speech had never been developed, and many whose voracious and indiscriminate gluttony satisfied itself with whatever they could lay hands upon, with the garbage thrown to swine, or with their own excrements; these unfortu-

\* *Comptes Rendus des Seances de l'Academie Royale des Sciences.*

nate beings, the rejected of humanity, I have seen properly clad, standing erect, walking, speaking, eating in an orderly manner at a common table, working quietly as carpenters and farmers; gaining, by their own labor, the means of existence; storing their awakened intelligence by reading one to another; exercising towards their teachers and among themselves, the generous feelings of man's nature, and singing in unison, songs of thanksgiving!"

"It is a miracle, you will exclaim; and so, indeed, it is, a miracle of intelligence, of patience, of love. When I expressed, to the teacher of the school at Biçetre, M. Vallée, my gratitude and my surprise at the results of his efforts, his reply was as profound as it was beautiful and modest. *Il ne faut, Monsieur, que la patience et le desir de bien faire.* 'Patience, and the desire to do good, are all that is necessary.' More than this is necessary, and I felt bound to complete his sentence by adding to it the noble motto which Don Henry, of Portugal, engraved on his shield, and, by his conduct, justified so well, *le talent de bien faire.* Patience and the talent, as well as the desire, to do good, are all *required*; but these can all be found in the community where Laura Bridgman has been taught; and, the possibility of success now fully established, it would be an insult to Massachusetts to suppose that she will not be among the first to make those efforts for her idiot population, which many European states are already commencing.

"The fact, I have said, is now clearly established, that idiots may be educated, *that the reflective power exists within them, and may be awakened by a proper system of instruction*; that they may be raised, from the filth in which they grovel, to the attitude of men; that they may be taught different arts which will enable them to gain an honest livelihood; and that, although their intelligence may never, perhaps, be developed to such a point as to render them the authors of those generous ideas and great deeds, which leave a stamp upon an age, yet still they may attain a respectable mediocrity, and surpass, in mental power, the common peasant of many European states."

Lest our correspondent should be supposed to be led into too great enthusiasm by what he saw, we will give the testimony of another witness:—



The first account of the school at the Bicêtre that reached this country, was the very interesting one by Dr. Conolly, principal physician of the great English asylum for the insane, at Hanwell. He visited the school in 1845. It is well that he wrote about it, for he ranks so high in the medical profession, and his peculiar acquaintance with mental maladies gives to his words more importance, than those of any unprofessional observer. It will not fail to be observed, that the degree of confidence to be placed in any system for instructing idiotic persons, and the amount of success of any teacher, must depend upon the condition of the pupil when he comes under instruction. It is one thing to teach a simpleton or an imbecile, and another to teach an idiot; it is one thing to teach an idiot who has the faculty of imitation actively developed, so that he will follow your motions easily, until habits of muscular exercise are established, and another to teach an idiot who has but very little disposition to imitate. So it is with other mental faculties. An unprofessional man would find it difficult to ascertain what was the probable condition of the trained pupil, before his training had commenced, but the medical man, who had spent his life among insane and idiotic persons, could understand it in spite of the changes produced by teaching. Dr. Conolly, therefore, is a most important witness; more important even than the teachers of the school. He was a stranger, a foreigner, and would not be likely to be deceived about the previous condition and capacities of the pupils, or to overrate the success obtained by their training. His account is still more valuable, because he gives us, besides a general view, a particular description of one individual case.

He says:—"No fewer than forty of these patients were assembled in a moderate-sized school-room, receiving various lessons and performing various evolutions under the direction of a very able schoolmaster, M. Séguin, himself a pupil of the celebrated Itard, and endowed with that enthusiasm, respecting his occupation, before which difficulties vanish. His pupils had been all taught to sing to music, and the little band of violins and other instruments, by which they were accompanied, was formed of the old almsmen of the hospital. But all the idiotic part of this remarkable class also sang without any musical ac-

companiment, and kept excellent time and tune. They sang several compositions, and among others a very pretty song written for them by M. Batelle, and sung by them on entering the class-room. Both the epileptic and idiotic were taught to write, and their copy-books would have done credit to any writing school for young persons. Numerous exercises were gone through, of a kind of military character, with perfect correctness and precision. The youngest of the class was a little idiot boy of five years old, and it was interesting to see him following the rest, and imitating their actions, holding out his right arm, left arm, both arms, marching to the right and left, at the word of command and to the sound of a drum beaten, with all the lively skill of a French drummer, by another idiot, who was gratified by wearing a demi-military uniform. All these exercises were gone through by a collection of beings offering the smallest degree of intellectual promise, and usually left, in all asylums, in total indolence and apathy. Amongst them was one youth whose intellectual deficiency was marked in every look, gesture and feature. I think a more particular account of this poor boy's progress deserving of record, as an inducement to the philanthropist to enter on a new field of instruction presenting many difficulties, but yet not unproductive of results."

"The age of Charles Emile is fifteen: he was admitted to the school in June, 1843. He is described as being of a nervous and sanguine temperament, and in an almost complete state of idiocy; the faculties which remain long in a state of extraordinary activity, and rendering him dangerous to himself and to others; but still idiotic in his inclinations, sentiments, perceptions, faculties of perception and understanding, and also in his senses, of which some were obtuse, and others too excitable. He was, consequently, unfit, to use the words of M. Voisin, 'to harmonize with the world without.' As regards his *inclinations*, he was signalized by a voracious, indiscriminate, gluttonous appetite, *un erotisme hideux*, and a blind and terrible instinct of destruction. He was wholly an animal. He was without attachment; overturned every thing in his way, but without courage or intent; possessed no tact, intelligence, power of dissimulation, or sense of property; and was awkward to excess.

His *moral sentiments* are described as *null*, except the love of approbation, and a noisy instinctive gayety, independent of the external world. As to his *senses*, his eyes were never fixed, and seemed to act without his will; his taste was depraved; his touch obtuse; his ear recognized sounds, but was not attracted by any sound in particular; and he scarcely seemed to be possessed of the sense of smell: devouring every thing, however disgusting; brutally sensual; passionate,—breaking, tearing, and burning whatever he could lay his hands upon; and if prevented from doing so, pinching, biting, scratching, and tearing himself, until he was covered with blood. He had the particularity of being so attracted by the eyes of his brothers, sisters, and play-fellows, as to make the most persevering efforts to push them out with his fingers. He walked very imperfectly, and could neither run, leap, nor exert the act of throwing; sometimes he sprang like a leopard, and his delight was to strike one sonorous body against another. When any attempt was made to associate him with the other patients, he would start away with a sharp cry, and then come back to them hastily. M. Voisin's description concludes with these expressions: 'All the faculties of perception in this youth are in a rudimentary state; and, if I may venture so to express myself, it is incredibly difficult to draw him out of his individuality, to place him before exterior objects, and to make him take any notice of them. It would not be far from the truth to say, that for him all nature is almost completely veiled.'

"This description not only exemplifies M. Voisin's careful mode of observation, but shows that an example of idiocy less favorable to culture could scarcely have been presented to the instructor. This same poor idiot boy is now docile in his manners, decent in his habits, and capable, though not without some visible effort, of directing his vague senses and wandering attention, so as to have developed his memory, to have acquired a limited instruction concerning various objects, and to have become affectionately conscious of the presence of his instructors and friends. His general appearance is still that of an idiot. His countenance, his mode of walking, all that he does, declares his very limited faculties. Nature has placed limits to



the exercise of his powers, which no art can remove. But he is redeemed from the constant dominion of the lowest animal propensities. Several of his intellectual faculties are cultivated; some have even been called into life; and his better feelings have acquired some objects and some exercise. In such a case as this, we are not so much to regard what is merely accomplished for the individual. A great principle is established by it in favor of thousands of defective organizations. After witnessing the general efforts of this school of the most imbecile human beings, and hearing the particulars of Charles Emile's history, it was really affecting to see him come forward when called, and essay to sing a little solo when requested; his attempt at first not being quite successful, but amended by his attention being more roused to it. His copy-book was then shown to me, and his writing was steady, and as good as that of most youths of his station in life. The schoolmaster, who seemed to take pleasure in the improvement of this poor fellow, then showed us how he had taught Charles to count, by means of marbles and small pieces of wood, or marks made on a board, arranged in lines, the first containing an O, the second O O, the third O O O, and so on. Charles was sometimes out in his first calculations, but then made an effort and rectified himself. He distinguished one figure from another, naming their value. Large pieces of strong card, of various shapes, were placed in succession in his hands; and he named the figure of each, as square, triangle, &c., &c., and afterward drew their outlines with chalk on a blackboard; and, according to the desire of M. Séguin, drew a perpendicular, or horizontal, or oblique line; so effectually attending to what he was doing, that if any line was drawn incorrectly, he rubbed it out and began anew. He also wrote several words on the board, and the name of the director of the Bicêtre, without the name being spoken to him.

"This case was almost the most interesting of those which I saw; but there was one poor idiot standing a great part of the time in a corner, to all appearance the very despair of art; even this poor creature, however, upon being noticed and brought to the table, proved capable of distinguishing the letters of the alphabet. Most of the others had received as much

instruction as has been described, and could count, draw lines and figures, write, perform various exercises, and point to different parts of the body, as the head, the eyes, the arms, the feet, &c, &c., when named to them. In all these cases, and preëminently in that of Charles Emile, the crowning glory of the attempt is, that whilst the senses, the muscular powers, and the intellect, have received some cultivation, the habits have been improved, the propensities regulated, and some play has been given to the affections; so that a wild, ungovernable animal, calculated to excite fear, aversion, or disgust, has been transformed into the likeness and manners of a man. It is difficult to avoid falling into the language of enthusiasm on beholding such an apparent miracle; but the means of its performance are simple, demanding only that rare perseverance, without which nothing good or great is ever effected; and suitable space, and local arrangements adapted to the conservation of the health and safety of the pupils; to the establishment of cleanly habits; to presenting them with objects for the exercise of their faculties of sense, motion and intellect, and to the promotion of good feelings and a cheerful, active disposition. The idiot who is capable of playing and amusing himself is already, as Mr. Séguin observes, somewhat improved. I can but regret that I had not time to watch the progress of this interesting school from day to day, and to trace the growth of knowledge in the different pupils; as, of the first ideas of form and color, into writing and drawing; the development of articulation into the power of verbal expression; the extension of memory to calculation; the subsidence of gross propensities, and springing forth and flourishing of virtuous emotions, in a soil where, if even under the most favorable circumstances the blossoms and fruits are few, but for philanthropic culture all would be noxious or utterly barren."

This school presents a most useful model for similar institutions; it is a beautiful example of practical christianity; it is a temple in which acceptable service is done to God, by love and care bestowed upon the most helpless of his creatures; and we cannot do better than give an account of the daily routine of its operations. This we do in the words of our valued correspondent, who visited it at a later period.

It must be borne in mind, that the scholars in this school were formerly wretched, dirty, drivelling idiots, gathered together from the cess-pools of society; they were outcasts, abandoned by their relatives, and left to their own ravening appetites and brutish propensities; they were rapidly sinking into absolute brutishness; their sun was going down, even in the morning of their days, and in a few years, the last breath would have left the senseless carcases from which all human spirit had long before fled.

Our correspondent says: "The number of pupils in the school has varied, for some time past, from 80 to 100. At 5 o'clock they rise, and pass half an hour in washing, combing, and dressing; the monitors—pupils more advanced,—aiding those whose instruction is but recently commenced. They then pass into the hall of classes, and range themselves in a double line, no easy task for the beginners; when they sing a simple morning prayer, repeated to them by the teacher. After this, they make their first breakfast, of a simple slice of bread. The class for the education of the senses now begins, and fills up the time till 8  $\frac{1}{4}$  A. M. In the 1st or highest division, several occupy themselves with surface and landscape drawing; and others, less advanced, with geometrical drawing upon the blackboard. The 3d division, divided into sections, is of those who are exercising the senses of smell, taste, sight, and observing color and form, by the method I have before described. The sense of hearing is exercised, among other means, by the pupil's learning to distinguish and name, while blindfolded, the natural sounds as produced by the cords of a bass-viol. Meanwhile, the youngest class, of 18 or 20, is going through its elementary gymnastics of the moving power.

From 8  $\frac{1}{4}$  to 9 A. M., is taken up by the study of *numeration* and *arithmetic*. Here the whole school is divided into frequently changing groups, according to the various capacities developed. The lowest of all is ranged in line, and taught to count aloud up to 30; a series of sticks, balls, or other material objects, being given them at the time. This helps to ameliorate their speech, and to stimulate to imitation those who have not that faculty. Another group is set to climb upon ladders, counting



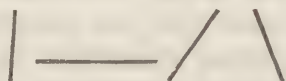
the number of rounds as they go up, and thus the muscular system, and knowledge of numeration, are simultaneously developed. A higher group is of those who count up to 50, with counters, and who, by means of them, get an idea of unity, plurality, subtraction, addition, and equality. A higher group still has learned to count up to 100, and another group is learning, by means of movable figures taken from a case, the combinations of numbers. Higher still, are boys working upon their slates, or going through calculations upon the blackboard, with a facility and precision that any pupil of Warren Colburn might envy.

From 9 to  $9\frac{3}{4}$ . Breakfast, of soup and a plate of meat. The pupils are here seated at table, and eat with fork and spoon, the more adroit aiding those less so.

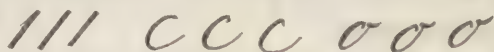
$9\frac{3}{4}$  to  $10\frac{1}{2}$ . Recreation in open air, running, playing ball, driving hoop, or cultivating a small plat of ground, the hire of which, for 3 months, each one may gain by a certain number of tickets of good conduct.

$10\frac{1}{2}$  to  $11\frac{1}{4}$ . Reading class, in which all take part, divided, however, into various groups, as before.

$11\frac{1}{4}$  to 12. Writing class. Here the lowest group is taught only to trace on the blackboard, with a ruler, these lines.



The next group is taught to make upon the board, the rudimental characters, as



making the three in each line. After this, they write on slates, and, when further advanced, the monitor being ready to guide their hands, they write in ruled books. The highest class rules its own books, and writes alternately a page of large and fine hand.

12 to  $12\frac{1}{2}$ . Gymnastics.

$12\frac{1}{2}$  to 1. Music.

1 to 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ . Manual labor. In this all take part; some as shoemakers, some as carpenters, or rather cabinet-makers, and some as tillers of the ground. One of the best exercises for the body, *inasmuch as it compels the idiot to walk and balance himself unaided*, is that of wheeling a barrow, charged with a weight proportionate to his strength. The most stupid may be soon taught this. Others more intelligent, wield spade and pickaxe most energetically and profitably; but nowhere does their awakened intelligence appear more satisfactorily, than in the work-shop of the cabinet-maker. When one of them has sawed through a plank, or nailed together two pieces of wood, or made a box, his smile of satisfaction, the consequence of "something attempted, something done," the real result of which he can estimate, is beautiful to see. Nor is their work by any means to be despised. With one cabinet-maker as teacher and monitor, they performed, last year, all the work necessary for their school-room and dormitories, as well as for a good part of the great establishment of Bicêtre. At shoemaking, they show intelligence; but this is too sedentary an occupation for them. Some, however, who have quitted the school, work at it; but the greater number of them become farmers and gardeners.

After this manual labor, they dine, and, after dinner, play till 6 $\frac{1}{4}$  P. M.

From 6 $\frac{1}{4}$  to 7. Grammar class; the lowest group is taught to articulate syllables; the highest, as much as in any grammar-school.

From 7 to 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ , is passed in reading to one another, or in conversations and explanations, with the teacher, upon things which may excite the reflective power. Two evenings in the week, this hour is devoted to a concert and a dance.

After this, comes the evening prayer, sung by all; and then, fatigued, but happy, they retire to rest.

Such is a day at the school at Bicêtre. Every Thursday morning, the teacher takes them to walk in the country, and then inculcates elementary notions of botany, designating by their names, and impressing by smell, taste, and sight, the qualities of different flowers, and useful vegetables, which they see. At the same time, he explains, by locality, the first ele-

ments of geography. On Saturday evening, there is a distribution of tickets of good conduct, three of which,—I have before observed,—pay the rent of a garden, and one of which may buy off, for another, with the consent of the teacher, the punishment adjudged for certain slight acts of negligence. You will see, at once, the effect which this must have upon the generous sentiments of the pupils. The sentiment of possession is developed; the rights of property taught; but its duties, and its true pleasures are, at the same time, impressed.”

There is another school, recently established in Switzerland, for teaching idiots, particularly the class denominated *cretins*.

*Cretinism* is a diseased condition of body, accompanied by idiocy, when there is defective size, or morbid structure of the brain and nervous system, and is modified by local circumstances, or atmospheric influences. It is not peculiar to Switzerland and the Pyrenees, but is sometimes found in low and flat countries of Europe, and, though rarely, in the United States. Idiots, closely resembling *cretins*, and, also, *albinos*, have been found in Massachusetts.

Cretinism may, or may not, be complicated with *goitre*.

“The head of *cretins* is usually deformed; the stature diminutive; the complexion sickly; the countenance vacant, and destitute of meaning; the lips and eyelids coarse; the skin and muscles flabby.”

“The qualities of the mind correspond to the deranged state of the body, and there are various degrees of stupidity.”\*

They abound mostly in Switzerland, and, as they are generally mild and gentle, they are looked upon with compassion, and called Cretins, a corruption of Christian; perhaps because unresisting gentleness was thought, by the simple shepherds, to be the true emblem of Christianity.

One of the most remarkable schools for idiots, is that established for this unfortunate class, by Dr. Guggenbühl, in Switzerland. This benevolent man was moved to pity by seeing a poor idiotic *cretin* on his bended knees, by the road-side, in speechless adoration of an image of the Saviour upon the cross.

\* Spurzheim on Insanity.



Here was a creature upon whom the light of *reason* had never dawned; who, according to the common doctrine, had only the animal instincts, by the impulses of which he was moved. But the good doctor thought otherwise. The idiot had no *reasoning faculties*, but he had the germs of some of the noblest faculties of the soul, and these, if properly treated, might grow and bear a harvest of good for time and for eternity. The doctor, therefore, gathered together, from the hamlets situated in deep valleys and dark gorges of the Alps, and from other unhealthy places, a number of these *cretins*, and removed them to a delightful spot high up upon the Abendberg, several thousand feet above the sea, and began to try to teach them. His success has been gratifying beyond measure, for, though he was not rich enough in this world's goods to carry on his work long, and his situation was too lonely to attract notice, yet friends were raised up to him, and his work so recommended itself to the human heart, that the few men who found him, gave him their blessing and their aid. Among the crowd of travellers, who seek for the sublime and beautiful only in inanimate nature, there were a few, whose more generous sympathies drew them up the Abendberg, (the Holy Mount, it should be called.) There they were astonished and moved by what they saw; the house of the good physician became to them more stately than a palace; his daily manner of doing his Father's business, seemed to them more truly religious than the pomp and incense of cathedrals; and the sight of gentle *cretins* and grateful idiots, clinging about their friend and saviour, made a deeper impression than that of mountains and glaciers. They carried home reports thereof; and now, as the waters are gathered from distant lakes and seas into the clouds to be softly distilled upon a dry and thirsty spot, so the riches collected by Englishmen in the far-off Indies, fall in gentle drops of charity, to quicken the seeds of love sown upon the barren Abendberg.

A school for idiots has recently been established in Prussia. In England, a few individuals have been taken under the care of the teachers of a school for deaf mutes.

No systematic efforts have yet been made in this country to teach a class of these sorely bereaved creatures, but individual

efforts have not been wanting in Massachusetts. The success here obtained, for the first time, in the education of persons who, by the English law, are considered to be necessarily idiots, as "wanting all those senses which furnish the human mind with ideas," has encouraged attempts to educate idiots. The results thus far are most satisfactory. In view of all these circumstances, therefore, we most earnestly recommend, THAT MEASURES BE AT ONCE TAKEN TO RESCUE THIS MOST UNFORTUNATE CLASS FROM THE DREADFUL DEGRADATION IN WHICH THEY NOW GROVEL.

The reasons for this are manifold, and strong, and hardly need to be repeated. In the first place, it would be an economical measure. This class of persons is always a burden upon the public. It is true, that the load is equally divided; it falls partly upon the treasury of the different towns; partly upon the state treasury, and partly upon individuals; so that the weight is not sensibly felt; but still it is not a whit the less heavy for that. There are at least a thousand persons of this class who not only contribute nothing to the common stock, but who are ravenous consumers; who are idle and often mischievous, and who are dead weights upon the material prosperity of the state. But this is not all; they are even worse than useless; they generally require a good deal of watching to prevent their doing mischief, and they occupy considerable part of the time of more industrious and valuable persons. Now it is made certain, by what has been done in other countries, that almost every one of these men and women, if not beyond middle age, may be made to observe all the decencies of life; to be tidy in their dress, cleanly in their habits, industrious at work, and even familiar with the simple elements of knowledge. If they were all made to earn something instead of spending, wasting, and destroying, the difference would be considerable. It would be an economy to some towns to send a young idiot across the ocean if he could be trained to such habits of industry as to support himself, instead of dragging out a life of two or three score years in the almshouse, and becoming every year more stupid, degraded, and disgusting. Many a town is now paying an extra price for the support of a

But the immediate adoption of proper means for training and teaching idiots, may be urged upon higher grounds than that of expediency, or even of charity; it may be urged upon the ground of imperative duty. It has been shown, that the number of this wretched class is fearfully great; that a large part of them are directly at the public charge; that the whole of them are at the charge of the community in one way or another, because they cannot help themselves. It has been shown, that they are not only neglected, but that, through ignorance, they are often badly treated, and cruelly wronged; that, for want of proper means of training, some of them sink from mere weakness of mind, into entire idiocy; so that, though born with a spark of intellect which might be nurtured into a flame, it is gradually extinguished, and they go down darkling to the grave, like the beasts that perish. Other countries are beginning to save such persons from their dreadful fate; and it must not be, that here, in the home of the Pilgrims, human beings, born with



higher task of transforming brutish men back into human shape? Other countries are beginning to rescue their idiots from further deterioration, and even to elevate them; and shall our Commonwealth continue to bury the humble talent of lowly children committed to her motherly care, and let it rot in the earth, or shall she do all that can be done, to render it back with usury to Him who lent it? There should be no doubt about the answer to these questions. The humanity and justice of the legislature will prompt them to take immediate measures for the formation of a school or schools for the instruction and training of idiots.

The benefits to be derived from the establishment of a school for this class of persons, upon humane and scientific principles, would be very great. Not only would all the idiots, who should be received into it, be improved in their bodily and mental condition, but all the others in the state and the country, would be indirectly benefited. The school, if conducted by persons of

skill and ability, would be a model for others. Valuable information would be disseminated through the country; it would be demonstrated that no idiot need be confined or restrained by force; that the young can be trained to industry, order, and self-respect; that they can be redeemed from odious and filthy habits, and that there is not one of any age, who may not be made more of a man, and less of a brute, by patience and kindness, directed by energy and skill.

It is not our duty to enter into any details, of the plan of such a school, or schools; that must be left to abler hands. We close this part of our report, therefore, by most earnestly recommending, that immediate measures be taken for the formation of such a school. In the Supplement will be found the result of our researches into the causes of the great frequency of idiocy in our borders, and such reflections as have been suggested by the examination of the subject generally. We have also prepared, with considerable labor, various tables in which is embodied a great deal of curious and interesting, if not valuable information.

All which is respectfully submitted, for the Commissioners, by

S. G. HOWE.





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